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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study of the characteristics of the social interaction of single sex and mixed groups. Two all male groups, two all female groups, and two mixed groups were studied over five 90-minute sessions. Interaction data was gathered by two observers who recorded each time a member spoke and to whom he/she spoke. Group meetings were tape recorded and a sample of 70,000 words was analyzed by the General Inquirer, a computer aided content analysis system. The results indicate connections between societal sex role requirements and small group behavior. The who-to-whom scoring and content analysis similarly reflect the themes of intimacy and interpersonal relations for women, and themes of competition and status for men. The findings also indicate that men and women express different parts of themselves in the content and structure of their groups when interacting with members of the same and the opposite sex.The interaction styles found in this study are then used as a framework from which to understand what does occur in other settings, specifically the classroom, and the committee or work group. Questions are raised about the limitations these styles impose on individual and group potential, and how we might begin to change them. (Author)

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Sex Differences in Small Group Behavior[1]

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We spend a large part of our days interacting in small groups, in informal conversations with friends and family, in meetings with co-workers, in classrooms, at parties. One question that has received surprisingly little attention is what effect the sex composition of these groups has on the interaction of the participants. In a recent edition of a book on group dynamics (Shaw, 1976) the author says:

> "It is a common observation that women's groups behave differently than men's. Groups of men are commonly believed to be task-oriented and business-like, and women's groups social-oriented and interested more in gossip than in getting the job done. Despite these stereotyped beliefs, there is little factual information about sex composition and group process."
> (Shaw, 1976, pp. 222-223)

In reviewing the literature on sex differences in small group behavior, we find that the majority of the research provides little insight into everyday group situations. There are few studies of naturally occurring group conversations in non-contrived situations between friends, family or co-workers in the normal course of the day. There are a number of laboratory studies that have found women to be more conforming, poorer problem solvers, and less competitive than men in groups (Bond & Vinacke, 1961; Hoffman & Maier, 1961; Tuddenham, 1958; Vinacke, 1959). But it is not clear how far you can generalize these results beyond the specific experimental tasks involved. In subsequent laboratory studies these sex differences have been reduced when the content of the task, or the

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motivation of the subjects has been altered (Milton, 1959; Sistrund & McDavid, 1971).

There are a number of small group studies that have yielded consistent results that seem to have generalizability outside the laboratory, and beyond the specific task involved. These studies tend to support the hypothesis that while men and women are capable of a wide range of behaviors, their differential socialization leads men to select more of a task emphasis, and women more of a social-emotional emphasis in groups.

Parsons and Bales (1955),in looking at the family as a small group, asserted that there are two main roles in the family. The husband's chief role is instrumental, getting things done, earning a living, while the wife's role is expressive, maintaining satisfactory relationships within the family, fostering the expression of feelings. Men and women have different primary areas of responsbility in the family.

Strodtbeck and Mann (1956) found a pattern similar to the family in mixed sex jury deliberations. The men tended more to pro-act, or initiate long bursts of acts directed at the solution of the task problem, while women tended to "react" to the contributions of others. Women showed tension release, agreement and solidarity. They concluded that:

> "It may be reasoned that a latent personality bias has been formed for interaction role selection.... a task emphasis tends to be selected by men, and a social-emotional emphasis by women."

One reason we find this overall tendency for women to engage in more socio-emotional behavior, and men more task behavior in groups is because there are strong pressures to fulfill roles congruent with traditional sex role requirements. Those who do not conform pay a price in anxiety and social rejection. Megargee

(1969) studied men and women who scored high or low on the personality trait dominance. He found that when a high dominance woman was paired in a group with a low dominance woman, that she would assume leadership in doing a task. But this was not the case when a high dominance woman was paired with a low dominance man. Sex role pressures dictate that men should assume dominance and leadership over women, and even when personality characteristics suggested the reverse, sex role expectations were the better predictor of behavior. High dominance women did not assume leadership over low dominance men. This study further supports the notion that the interpersonal styles individuals display in a group do not represent their entire repertoire of behaviors, but tend instead to be ones selected to meet the social sex role pressures in that group situation.

The study which I am going to present follows up on the ideas in these earlier investigations. It is an analysis of the interaction patterns and discussion content of single sex and mixed groups. Its' goal was to gain further information about the types of interactionstyles that occur in these small group settings. After presenting the study, I want to look at the implications of the results for other group settings, in particular the classroom and the committee or work group.

Method

Six experimental groups were run, two all male groups, two all female groups and two mixed groups ranging in size from 5 to 7 members. Members were volunteer subjects drawn from an undergraduate population at an Eastern Ivy League school. The groups met in five 1 1/2 hour sessions with the task of getting to know each other. All groups were co-led by the author and a male co-leader. The leaders played a minimal role, making occasional observations about the group process, but not taking responsibility for providing topics for discussion. The leaders were the lowest initiators and receivers of interaction in the groups, each initiating less than 4% and receiving less than 5% of the interaction.

Both the interaction patterns of the participants and content of their discussions were studied. Data on the interaction patterns were gathered by two observers who recorded each time a member spoke and to whom he or she spoke, noting whether a speaker addressed another individual, or the group as a whole (Bales, 1970). The unit of interaction recorded was a single speech with the additional property that for every 15 seconds a speaker continued another act was scored. Rescoring acts every 15 seconds was imposed so that the number of scores for a person reflects the time he or she takes up in participation. The inter-rater reliability of the rates of interaction initiated and received was 95%.

The sessions were tape recorded and the content of the discussion was analyzed by the General Inquirer, a computer aided content analysis system (Stone, Dunphy, Smith & Ogilvie, 1966). From the tapes, 5 minutes were transcribed every half hour to reduce the 45 hours of tape recordings to a more manageable amount, producing a sample of 70,000 words. The data was further split in half to provide a control for sampling bias. The General Inquirer reads the text of the transcripts, assigns each word into categories, and produces frequency counts on those categories. For example, it assigns the word professor to the categories human, academic, role, power, or friend to human, affiliation, positive. This is the first time the General Inquirer has been used to analyze the actual conversations of small groups. It has been used previously to analyze the weekly self-reports written by group members (Dunphy, 1966).

Results

Let me begin analyzing the results by looking at the patterning of initiating and receiving interaction in the groups. If you rank order the members in each session from who spoke the most to who spoke the least, you get one picture of the relative power of members in a group. Group members who initiate the most interaction are taking up the most time in the group, and can be considered to be taking

a more dominant leadership position. In the mixed groups males were found to both initiate and receive more interaction than females, assuming at least two of the top three ranks in every session. The small group became then a microcosm of the larger society in which it is considered appropriate for men to dominate women but not the reverse, and sex role pressures seemed to be operating to lead men to assume leadership in mixed groups.

The rank order of speaking yields further information by considering whether a similar rank order is maintained from session to session, with the same members holding either dominant or submissive positions over time. The male groups established a more stable dominance order over time than the female groups. In the male groups, the same males were the most active speakers in every session, and never missed sessions. The only males who missed sessions were inactive speakers, and they never assumed important positions in later sessions.

In the female groups, on the other hand, there was greater flexibility in the rank order of speaking over time. The active speakers said they felt uncomfortable in the leadership positions, felt they were taking up too much time in the group, and in some sessions they drew out more silent members, and assumed lower ranks. For the females who missed a session, there seemed to be an opportunity to make up for lost time, for these females usually became high speakers in the session following their return. This difference between all male and all female groups in dominance or leadership style points to the fact that for males there is a greater concern in their social interaction than for females with competition and leadership, with where one stands in relation to other members of the same sex. For females there is a greater concern with expressing affection and interpersonal concern in their social interaction with members of the same sex.

These differences in interpersonal style are further supported by examining

the amount of interaction addressed to the group as a whole, rather than to individuals. Talking to the group as a whole has been considered as an exercise of power or influence in a group (Bales, 1970). It is a style which shows less concern with individuals than with being seen andheard by all. Significantly more interaction was addressed to the group as a whole in the all male groups than in the all female groups (36% and 30% for the male groups versus 9% and 4% for the female groups).

This difference in style also follows the same patterns that have been found in male and female adolescent friendships. Females form close one-to-one relationships with other females, developing an interpersonal style with women of intimacy and closeness. Males form less intimate friendships in groups or gangs which support them in their development of independence (Douvan & Adelson, 1966). The exercise of power and influence becomes an important part of the male style of relating to other men.

The mixed groups provide an important comparison to the single sex groups, and demonstrate that the interpersonal styles of men and women are different in the single sex and mixed group settings. Looking again at addressing the group as a whole, males addressed significantly more of their interaction to the group as a whole in all male groups than they did when interacting with women. I can suggest two possible reasons for the difference in style with the shift in the sex composition of the groups. Just as in their friendships males avoid close one-to-one contact, in all male groups they may avoid the closeness evoked by pairwise contact by addressing the group as a whole. Pairwise contact is both more attractive and less threatening in a mixed setting, and in both interaction patterns and discussion content males take on a more interpersonal orientation with women present. Men learn that affection and interpersonal concern are more appropriate

between the sexes, than between men. Another explanation is that all male groups create greater pressures to establish oneself and a greater threat to one's identity than the mixed group setting, and these pressures lead to an increase in attempts at power and influence in the all male setting.

While the female style of addressing individuals remained constant in both all female and mixed groups, an important pattern emerged for women in mixed groups. In all groups there was an upward flow of communication from inactive speakers to active speakers, and under this pattern with males dominating there would be a low probability of female to female interaction. However, sessions where females initiated a more equal amount of interaction were marked by more cross-sex than same sex interaction. Thus, while increased participation did increase male communication with women, it did not increase interaction between women. The social significance of women for each other in a mixed group was low, and this pattern reflects the conventional training women receive to compete with each other to win the attention and affection of males, and to regard males as more important in conversations. Movements for women's liberation are now making women aware of their lack of significant relationships with members of their own sex, and need for support from other women.

Having looked at <u>how</u> men and women related to each other in groups on an interactional level, we turn to the content of their conversations. The General Inquirer content analysis shows several important differences between the groups, differences which are consistent with the differences in interaction patterns. Let us first consider the single sex groups, and then bring in the mixed groups as a comparison.

The first major differences between the groups revolved around the issue of intimacy and openness, how close group members wanted to be, and how much they

wanted to reveal about themselves. Males in the all male groups talked very little of themselves, their feelings, or of their relationships with significant others. In the all female groups, on the other hand, members shared a great deal of information about themselves, their feelings, their homes, and their relationships with family, friends, and lovers. The General Inquirer shows more frequent references by females than by males in categories for self, feelings, affiliation, home and family.[2]

The second area of difference was in regard to competition and aggression. One of the greatest concerns expressed by members of the all male groups was where they stood in relation to each other. This initially took the form of brain picking, sizing up the competition in the group by finding out who was the best informed about movies, books, current events, politics and travel. There were frequent references to practical joking, tricking someone out ofsomething, into something, or simply being one up. This pattern of self-aggrandizement and sarcastic teasing was also found by Newman (1971) to be quite prevalent in all male high school groups. If a member was not quick and clever, he became the target of joking.

The themes of superiority and aggression were often merged in the male groups. Stories were told of the riots between dormitories, and of the pranks played where participants humiliated, threatened and terrorized others. The theme of victim or victimizer ran through most stories, often evoking themes of castration and fears of loss of masculinity and potency. The General Inquirer documents these differences between the all male and all female groups by showing more frequent

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[2]The technical names of the categories are: 1st person singular, feel, affiliation, and references to the word "home" within the category place: social gathering.

references for males in its categories for sports and amusements, physical hostility, action, and the category describing what someone may have seen, read or heard.[3]

Stylistically the male and female groups differed; that is, males engaged in dramatizing and story telling, jumping from one anecdote to another, and achieving a camaraderie and closeness through the sharing of stories and laughter. Females discussed one topic for a half hour or more, revealing more feelings, and gaining a closeness through more intimate self-revelation. The findings from the content analysis and who-to-whom scoring similarly reflect the themes of intimacy and interpersonal relations for women, and themes of competition and status for men. Males, unlike females, avoid a high degree of intimacy with members of their own sex and acknowledge warmth and friendship in the form of joking and laughter. The strength of the competitive and aggressive images is related not only to being a male, but also to the developmental stage of the group members. Adolescence is a period when individuals face strong pressures of socialization into their sex role, and it is through aggressive play and competition, confronting and differentiating oneself from others that a male establishes his own potency, competence and independence. The predominance in the female groups of themes of loving and being loved, of home and family reflect the female socialization and concerns towards their future roles in conventional society as wife and mother.

The mixed groups provide an interesting comparison to the single sex groups. Groupmembers directed their attention more towards the group itself, expressing concerns about what to talk about, and how group members felt about the proceedings. Some of the themes that were very important in the one sex groups played a less

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[3] The technical names of the categories are: expressive, hostile, active: move-exert, and communicate.

significant part in the mixed groups. The male themes of aggression, competition, victimization and practical joking were no longer frequent. These gave way to talk by males of themselves and their feelings. The General Inquirer documents the overall emphasis by the mixed groups on the group itself by the frequent references in the category for the communication taking place in the group.[4] The dramatic change in the behavior of males from the single sex groups to mixed groups is revealed by more frequent references in categories for self, and feelings, and decreased references in categories for sports and amusements.[5] We may conclude that the presence of women changes the all male style of interacting, causing males to develop a more personal orientation, with increased one-to-one interaction, greater self-relevation, and a decrease in the aggressive, competitive aspects of the encounter.

For females the difference in interaction style from the single sex to mixed group setting is less dramatic. The General Inquirer shows a decrease in discussion by women in the mixed groups of home and family.[6] This may reflect the female desire to present themselves as more competent and independent when males are present. However, there are certain costs for women in the mixed group setting. The presence of men causes women to speak less, initiating only 34% of the total interaction. Women spoke less than men of achievement, power, and the institutions of society, all traditionally male concerns.[7] The mixed group setting seems to

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[4] The technical name of the category is communicate.

[5] The technical names of the categories are: 1st person singular, feel, and expressive.

[6] The technical names of the categories are: references to the word "home" within the category place: social-gathering, and kinship.

[7] The technical names of the categories are: achieve, power, academic, economic, expressive, legal, political, religious.

benefit men more than women by allowing men more variation in their interpersonal style, while for women it brings more restrictions in style.

For both sexes the mixed group setting brought more awkward silences and hesitations at first, and then led to a point of excitement and nervousness evoked by the emphasis on the encounter itself and the possibilities for pairing. The General Inquirer revealed that for both males and females in the mixed groups there was greater use of emphatic, exaggerated words, and more doubtful,uncertain words, connoting a defensive style (Stone et al., 1966). There were also more frequent uses of qualifications (if, not, maybe, possibly, etc.) in the mixed groups than in the single sex groups.[8]

Discussion

The study reveals that there are differences in the characteristics of social interaction for men and women in single sex and mixed groups, differences that reflect the sex role demands of conventional society. Men and women in these groups expressed different parts of themselves in the content and structure of their groups when interacting with members of the same and the opposite sex. We have seen, for example, that the men had a more personal orientation in a mixed setting, addressed individuals more often, spoke more about themselves and their feelings, while in an all male setting they were more concerned with the expression of competition and status. We have seen that women in all women's groups shared a great deal with each other. In mixed groups, though, women had minimal contact with other women, and allowed men to dominate. We also see from this study that despite the new ideology developing about sex roles, it was not yet incorporated into the patterns of social interaction.

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[8] The technical names of the categories are: overstate, understate and qualify.

Hypotheses have been generated about the patterns of social interaction in single sex and mixed groups, patterns which reflect the sex role standards of society. Further data are needed in order to be certain that these results generalize to other groups. The subjects in this sample were white, middle class, college students. It would be important to test whether these patterns appear in groups differing in age, race or social class. The groups in this study were also experimentally created, and it would be important to test whether these patterns appear in naturally occurring groups in different settings, in work groups, classrooms, or informal conversations.

There is already strong evidence that many of these patterns do appear in other settings. Tallman (1975) has been doing analyses of natural conversations that occur in the course of a day between acquaintances, friends, family, people living together. She has not looked at conversations in classrooms, meetings, or experimental psychology laboratories as I did, yet her data looks strikingly similar to my own. She has found a social style of conversations in groups, with the following characteristics:

> "Participants seem to be thinking of their own next comment, of their own performance, rather than showing attentiveness to the person speaking. Often speakers compete to tell a better joke, give more accurate information, find a better punchline. The purpose of the talk in social style conversation is at least to fill the time with words, at best to entertain those present. Laughter is a sign of a good conversation. The stories which are told are told to amuse, to make a point which enlightens, entertains, or shocks the listeners." (p. 9)

She goes on to say that many of the comments are made to the group as a whole, that interruptions occur frequently, and that topics come and go quickly. What Tallman has called social style was strikingly similar to the style of conversation that appeared in the all male groups.

Tallman has also found a personal style of conversations in groups which is characterized by speakers directing their comments to individuals rather than to the group as a whole. Topic length, length of utterance and length of uninterrupted statements is greater in personal style than in social style, and the amount of laughter decreases. There are more comments about feelings, and greater hesitations in speaking. Again, what Tallman has called personal style is very similar to the style of conversation that appeared in the female and mixed groups.

Tallman's work suggests that the patterns I found in experimentally created groups do generalize beyond my specific sample of subjects, beyond the laboratory, to people conversing in groups in the normal course of the day. It may be helpful to use these styles, or patterns of interaction, as a framework from which to understand what goes on in a variety of settings. The two settings I would like to look at are the classroom, and the committee or work group, with a focus on how this research might give us some insights into both what <u>does</u> occur in these group settings, and what <u>might</u> occur if we could make some changes in these groups in order to realize the potential of individuals, and the collective potential of groups.

The classroom is a group setting which seems to call for the social style, the style I found in all male groups. People come into this type of a group situation with some shared assumptions about the kinds of interactions that are expected and appropriate. Much of the energy in classroom learning is engaged in competition, verbal duelling and fighting, proving oneself to be one up on the

material. People are more concerned with their own performances, establishing themselves, than in showing attentiveness to others. Many males are good at this style, they are confident in their intellectual ability, they enjoy the competition because they know they will come out on top. This is the type of male who showed up at the top of the rank order of speaking across sessions in the male groups. But other males, while familiar with social style, may feel less articulate, less confident, and more vulnerable intellectually. These males tend to speak less, as did the males at the bottom of the rank order of speaking who never played an active role in the groups I ran.

If we find social style conversations, or patterns similar to the all male groups in the classroom, what happens to the female in the classroom? Women showed personal style in their conversations in both female and mixed groups, and therefore tend to be at a disadvantage if the classroom operates in social style for three reasons.

First, when a woman adopts social style and is good at it, and gets into the verbal thrust and parry, she is seen as aggressive, and overbearing, and is often disliked by other members of the class. She is violating sex role expectations that women are to be nonassertive, nonaggressive, and non-competitive. Some women who do adopt this style may discontinue it if they are concerned about being seen positively by other members of the class.

Second, many women do not even have social style as a well developed part of their repertoire. They don't feel comfortable with it, and have little inclination to engage in it. They tend then to fal' silent, or to participate in a minimal way either by asking questions, agreeing with the comments of others, or mainly serving as an audience to the other high participators.

Third, women's socialization leads them to be more dependent and more reliant on others for a sense of direction. They traditionally seem to engage in learning in a more passive way, doing what they are told, learning material assigned without questioning it. These qualities again make them ill-suited for participation in social style conversations in the classroom which demand taking a more active stance in working with the material, questioning it, reacting to it.

How can the classroom become a setting in which more people will be able to get involved, and enjoy the interaction? There are several possibilities. First, in order to make women feel comfortable interacting in social style, we have got to expand the notions of what is sex role appropriate behavior. Women are going to have to feel that they won't pay a price in social rejection for being competitive, for being intellectual, or expressing themselves in an assertive manner.

Second, women are going to have to have opportunities to learn to feel comfortable with social style. Assertiveness training groups, for example, are becoming increasingly widespread and popular, giving women a structured environment in which to practice being assertive. Women are going to need similar types of training in skills that their experiences growing up haven't given them the same practice in as men.

A third possibility is that social style may not be the only style in which people can interact in the classroom. In the single sex groups members knew how to proceed. There was little hesitation; for men it was in social style, for women in personal style. In the mixed groups there was a period of negotiation between the sexes as to how to proceed. With much greater hesitations, silences, qualifications of speech the outcome was a shift for males from social to personal

style. These results indicate that in groups people may either share an assumption of what type of interaction is called for, or may jointly negotiate what is the best way in which to interact. The more the teacher engages in social style, and encourages such discussions, the more likely the style will persist, and that a few students will participate in, and enjoy the class, and that the majority will remain low participaters. If the teacher encourages more personal style, and engages in it, showing tolerance for less well articulated, well rehearsed statements, encouraging connections to personal experience, discouraging interruptions, so as to hear people out, directing comments to individuals, and encouraging comments between individuals, the more likely that a greater percentage of students will participate in the discussions. If the discussion is seen as intrinsically rewarding, that is, gives students a sense of self-esteem rather than a sense of inadequacy and self-doubt, students will more likely want to get involved. Social style conversations are seen by many as risky, one risks being put down, showed up, or proven wrong. A mixture of styles might be advantageous to both participation and learning.

One final comment on mixed sex classrooms in particular. In the mixed groups I ran, the males dominated, initiating two-thirds of the interaction, and assuming two of the top three ranks in every session. These patterns might have been even more extreme if the task of the groups had not been to get to know one another. This placed an importance on cross sex communication, with men showing a concern with getting to know the other women as well as the men. When the classroom has the task of discussing specific material, there is not the same incentive for men to listen to and address the women. Only if students are made aware of the inequalities in speaking in these classrooms can more equal participation by both sexes be attained.

Many of the same ideas I've been discussing for the classroom hold true for the committee or work group, but I want to focus on a slightly different aspect of the interaction. Committee meetings, like classrooms, seem to call for the social style. One interesting aspect of social style conversations that Tallman (1975) found was that two special roles appear. She found a dominator "who speaks the most, has the most comments directed to him/her, interrupts and gets interrupted the most, introduces topics the most, or speaks first after the topic has been introduced." The second role she found was the host, "who tries to include everyone in the conversation. He/she addresses questions and comments to individuals, in order to bring them out. He/she will mediate if conflicts start to emerge" (p. 10). The dominator bears some similarity to the task specialist, and the host to the socio-emotional specialist.

One problem that men and women face then in the work group is being confined to these traditional instrumental-expressive roles. Women have learned to participate in social style conversations by being the socio-emotional specialist, but they should not be limited to this role. Turning over roles or functions to others in a group means turning over the gratifications and the competency associated with those functions. For women, by turning over the leadership functions to men, they cannot attain the rewards or skills of leadership, or power. Nor will women be able to attain these rewards or skills until we expand the notion that this is sex role appropriate behavior for women. Women will not be able to work for groups to the level to which they are competent if they feel they will pay a price for assuming power over men, or for being assertive and intellectual. Likewise for men, by turning over the socio-emotional concerns to women, and stressing competition and status, they cannot get the rewards or skills of supportiveness, and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships. Both of these roles may be necessary to group functioning, but they need not be assigned on the basis of sex.

We have seen that groups of all women adopt a personal style, avoid dominance or leadership, show less attempts at influencing the group as a whole, and more concern with individuals. This type of style is not always the most effective for getting work done. If all female groups try to avoid leadership as an overall strategy, they may at times put themselves at a disadvantage, when the exercise of power could be efficient. It would be advantageous for women to be able to engage in both social and personal style and to be able to use either style when appropriate.

What I would like to advocate, in conclusion, is that group members be made conscious of the styles in which they operate. Only in becoming aware of these styles and the limitations they impose on individual and group potential, can we begin to change them. In order to achieve these ends we are going to have to develop a new sense of what are sex role appropriate styles for men and women in groups. We are going to have to give men and women a chance to learn to expand their repertoire of behaviors. And finally we are going to have to increase our flexibility in changing styles in groups using either social or personal style when it is most appropriate. These are difficult goals, but within our reach.

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